

POETRY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

THE Professor of English at Columbia University, Mr. Lionel Trilling has just published in this country a book of essays covering the last ten years. His book is called *The Liberal Imagination*. Mr. Trilling was one of the editors of *Partisan Review*, the American counterpart of *Horizon*. It is worth remarking that the circulation of the two magazines was almost identical—6,000 in 1944, 10,000 after establishment a few years later. Serious readers in both the Anglo-Saxon democracies of 150 million and 50 million respectively evidently add up to the same figure. Mr. Trilling has some brave words to say in one of his essays on the function of the "little magazine" "which is a heroic response to the lowering of the status of literature" by the commercial gentlemen. And these great liberal periodicals with their snob appeal were able to command such a number of serious readers in both countries. But the poetry printed by these magazines, with their strong political bias was more than a little unimaginative and insensitive to anything but the trend of their own directions. For a purely poetry magazine like *Poetry Quarterly* politics must be, we believe, kept in check. We thank Allah indeed that we are still here and full of life. In fact our sales were once 4,000. Though they have diminished we can still appeal to a world wide public of people who want to write poetry, forget politics and live.

It is, however, with regret that we have to announce that owing to increased costs of production it has been necessary with this issue to revert to our original size of 48 pages. But the same amount of poetry will be printed as before, and our policy of welcome to writers in the U.S.A. and the Dominions and Colonies remains unchanged.

We are glad to welcome three American poets HOWARD GRIFFIN, WILLIAM GODDEN and EDITH WEAVER to our pages as well as H. MARSMAN and G. ACHTERBERG translated from the Dutch and HENNY KLEINER from Israel.

THOMAS GOOD

Spring in Exile

The shutters open clattering, spring they say
But the cold day
Brings no hint of favour, only the odour
of sage amongst the drab grass shivering,
The red-wing in the warped bed of the dry canal,
Westwards over the nearer mountain file
Grey fumes of early mist, dark whorls which drape the
silver,
Hanging like smoke an instant, obscuring the bald peaks
And the cascades like velvet seething,
Gliding across the polished surface of the world.

Those who aspire to love this morning
Together may drift like the water-lily
So arrogant and pure in bud
On pools of unruffled beauty,
Or defeating prudent calculations, soon unite and run
Along some dazzling footpath followed by the sun.

Under the awning
The Jazz fiends are crooning to each other,
Nonchalant lackeys of the future,
The stale small-talk, stale smell of empty bottles,
Vampires who rob the day with whispers,
Load the putrescent afternoon;
The flails of guilt and shame
Have bred more passionate men
Than lapdogs secure in love and fame,
Like the white doe constrained to run before the horn
Into the trackless woods where the cub is born.

Now in her circuit Hesperus looks back
The sensitive slow courier of light
Patrols the upper bye-pass of the night,
The man anointed on the hill of transformation mounts
Out of the picture and memory,
Destined for another country, sighs for home.

JAMES MICHIE

City Morning in August

The air is strict, the skyline neat,
Where roof-top red and cloud-cloth meet;
Behind in silent wake the sun
Smashes in a jig-saw at my feet.

I plot my pattern and keep my time
With the floodlit, jogging caste, for I'm
A minor character suiting his steps
To the breakfast ballet, the morning mime.

Nine-o'clock laughs on the lioned square,
While doves sign valentines over the air.
Shade your eyes. Watch the blue
Lagondas glitter in the shallow glare!

Sun-motes, like acrobats, make me laugh,
And all the brittle folk who show only half
Of themselves before the day is deep,
A glossy illustration or a photograph.

Of their obverse side, where an unreal glaze is
Plated. Pedestrians follow the phases
Of early elaborate ring-a-roses,
As the traffic changes the ways of its mazes.

Then I sit on a bench with nothing to lose
But a fortune in minutes, and sleepily amuse
The nature lover inside my eyes
With ankles in copses or avenues.

But the clock, which has disapprovingly viewed
Such pococorante lassitude,
Clicks with his tongue, prologues, perorates,
And limits my pilfered interlude;

So I go, drawn down the kerb's unwavering
Rail, well watched, while I walk engraving
A shadow against the concrete wall
And a chessboard jacket on the oblong paving.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Landscape Near Geneva, 1950

(For Hans-Joachim Haecker)

Summer ago

I walked beside that lake, where like presiding elders
Alp and the Jura raised to serene heaven
Their candid heads—lapped in a valley's greenness,
Whose trees were rife with nightingale's synods,
And every tongue of grass
A pulpit for the throbbing cicala.
With alien friends I walked, out of a Europe
Broken like bread and scattered on the mountains,
Whose hearts, perturbed and passionate, recalled
The iconographic hand, the gift of tongues,
Silenced and stricken in the room of poverty:
Commemoration of the Christ transfigured,
With Law and Prophecy, upon the hills,
Descending to an epileptic world.

KENNETH GEE

The Return

Bread and jug stand on the table
That might be laid only an hour before.
The yellow spearhead of the candle shivers;
There is no wind nor hand need open this door.
Here no stranger comes, only the child
Alone to his feast; here he can find again,
As in a ritual of bread and wine,
His old and unchanged place, his narrow world.
The fire still glowing on his father's hearth
Melts the iron of the winter earth,
Checks the cold breath that comes from grave-deep clay.
The winter elegy the heart had learned,
And lost in other country, sounds today,
Peace for his mind where grief's sharp wheel had turned.

HAROLD PINTA

So, This Morning of Marvels

So, this morning of marvels
I to the wispy day and blue,
Laying Africa and the bronze sword
To dust, see menace and gloat that a miracle
Wears, on that rust moon pale
In pall of haze.

The day brings autumnal cataracts' fall
Of iron and no heart,
But heartless and lazy, wearing
The scrawling ocean, I spell
All the toy faces their senators
To salt and poor dirt on defencing tentacles.

In this ragged hour in the hovel, falter
Of time on a bumping hoop,
Still see and say of a marvel
Of morning and the wheeling
Day to the eye, the dark, the
Candle shut and ending,
And the sea's halled pillars.

DENISE LEVERTOV

Fear of the Blind

The blind tap their way from stone to stone
feel from shadow to shadow, suncaressed
between the plane-trees.
I listen with closed eyes to the dry
autumnal sound of their searching.
Whom the tree grows in, whom clouds compel,
green enters, red blue of a bell
of a ringing sky; whom wings delight
or waving weed on frayed sleeves of the sea,
I fear the blind: they cannot share my world
but stop its spinning with their heavy shadows.

PARIS 1947

TESSA SILLARS

Knowledge in the Dark

Attention is composed
In the opalescent womb.
Shed from the silent flesh
Gentle, luminous,
A wise beholding that can touch
Where the brush of thought is brutal.

In the wisdom of the husbandman,
In the gentleness of fathers,
There is a necessary stretch
Of hands and heart
That reaches an embracing thought
Attendant on the smaller things
Beyond the brevity of speech.

Behind closed eyes, in modesty and reticence,
Moves the attentive mind.
With feeling fingertips it measures time
Imperceptibly.
Its enigmatic innocence endures
The arbitrary tyranny
Of language.

With courtesy of heart,
With balanced scruple,
Attention must be paid.
Its dues are old
Beyond the mutability of man's invention.
Even God requires this tribute
From his subjects.

Speech into silence,
Meaning into music,
These are the motions
The listening heart attends.
This knowledge moves in the dark,
Keeping the quiet
Of the pause before
The recognition.

DENYS VAL BAKER

Lines from Land's End

Here the red light winks
And the seas roar. The day
Begins with the whistler wind
And the crash of stony feet
Marching upon a ravaged land.
They do not stop, at the tripper's bleat
Or the motor-coach horn. Their ghosts
Haunt certain cliffs like shadows
Waiting to pounce. Beware, beware!
It's cold in the hidden caves
And seawashed caverns. Great shells
Echo with hollow laughter. Birds strut
Like ridiculous actors on a stage
Set by a God for Lilliputs.

We are the remnants
Posted to guard this ancient time
Stored in cellars, in sullen hours,
Untapped by thoughtless visitors,
Unwanted by scientific man,
Believed only by the solitary diggers,
Perhaps with clerical collar, but open mind,
Thinking of druids and bards and old kings
Borne to their graves on burning pyres.
No trees grow here where the wind
Tears at the earth like a hating hand.
Life is upon us, swift as a storm;
Lived hard, soon buried, soon forgot—
A craggy foothold on the edge of doom:
No place for tomorrow, today is enough
Here, wind-blown and rain-strewn,
 at the end of the land.

MARGARET CROSLAND

Aladdin

Do not rub this lamp;
do not be smug Aladdin
with a dangerous hopeful smile—
O no my lovely market boy
remember the rolled-out rugs,
all your jumble of brassy bowls,
the glassy jewels you stole.

Do not call him back,
that tall silent ghost
in the circle of purple fire—
O no his time was pantomime
and his white-eyed grin
or the twirl of his hand
was a hint from a day-dream land.

Do not ask for wealth—
you always knew
the princess from the slave.
O no, she's not beyond your reach,
the lamplight breaks open the mirror,
flares through a strange hall where
jewels gather on the stairs.

ROY McFADDEN

Death Dive

That film you saw in childhood: the air plane
Echoing down to death, and all the time
The airman's eyes unflinching till the ground
Rose in a giant hand and shattered him.
So you must bear the plunge of heart, and watch
Faithfully until the open hand
Of darkness catches you. Then, only then,
Is there a half chance that you'll understand.

R. CROMBIE SAUNDERS

The Mole

The withered days blow from the shaken branch
And drop on cold earth where the worms feed
On dead memories. Frost silvers decay,
And through the soil of time in a blind hope
Love tunnels with small powerful hands,
The last ally in the time of our defeat.

In every heart the desperate headlamps race
Down the black roads of distrust and fear,
Each bend revealing futures we do not want
And each road ending at a past we dread.
So midnight wheels its cargo through the sky,
And not a voice is heard to cry Repent.

Under the frozen leaves the small beast turns
And strains at a task it does not comprehend,
Its muscles taut with destiny, and joy
In its sightless eyes. But O, the time is short.
Already the raven lifts a tattered wing
And flies to meet its shadow on the crag.

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The Head of Sorrow

(After the bronze by Auguste Rodin)

Thrown back
And the lids down,
As if in rapture, death or sleep.
The cheeks', the forehead's wide hard span of bone
Has strength in it to uphold space
And to bridge all abyss.
But see the mouth, resistless,
Bursts open for torrential silence—

Ah stricken, slack,
Lost, bankrupt cavity which lately spent
The terrible italics of her cry.

VERNON SCANNELL

The Visitation

The fire is small and hushed, the candle's speech
Is muted to a whisper while the walls
Tremble, move closer, then nervously withdraw;
Somewhere, beyond this world, a nightbird calls.

The clock counts moments in its neat black voice,
The wind complains that night is cruel to him,
Small pools of darkness brim the shallow vales
Delved in the white plain of the counterpane.

The bed seems strangely large, the intricate
Carved posts are parodied by aggravated
Semblances that mime upon the ceiling:
Only the pillowed head is unrelated;

Only the old frail skull and waxen hands
That rest upon the counterpane seem certain,
Indifferent to the terror that informs
The room's hysteria, the frightened curtain.

The noiseless gibberish of shadows grows
More feverish; bird cries from night's cold hill
Imperious; the candle weeps, the fire burns low,
The clock is ticking but the hands are still.

CHARLES HIGHAM

The Dead King

Old as the fire and the dark cairn of stone
where the peat's acrid taste tangs on the wind,
do not forget that I was once a King
nor that I loved, having a golden hour
under the sea's sun and the sky's, making my bed
in the sand, triumphing royally through the ocean's
blood.

Not many years ago as we can vision
by the water wrinkled scarp and the black thorn's leap
under the crowing tempest; not many years
in the tick of the blood, joy-faring voyagers—
O come, my subjects of the field, the hills,
and heap my bones with yours where the heron hails.

Lover, this April is your own; the marching tread
of dark awakes you from the womb of sleep;
come to the earth where blindly scatters my dust
and laugh a miracle to the red-pointed sun.
Do not forsake me. Here in the cold I lie
waiting for a seed to pride me over the lea.

I died. This was a King. Point to me now:
the heap of stones, the dead ash of a smile,
and vaunting cavalry requiemed to the stars.
Here in the heavens' waste I walk and dream
of times when wonder's shoals shimmered through seas,
and now I must bow to the word that the tempest says.

PHILLIP MURRAY

The Lost Children

Sloe-eyed and ginned we pick our blackthorn love
Through granite forests blossomed brick and blunt,
But bright by moonlight, window-leafed in gold;
Stagger the vines, the darkly veining streets
Where all the harried creatures of the night
Crush out their wine in doorways and in doubt;

But if our feet are purple it is blood,
Our bleeding damson coughing up a stone,
For we are children lost in that wild wood
Again whose sterling tears avert not stone
Nor steel;

our drunken gestures mime
The mute semantics of our garden dream,
Hanging, the wonder of the seven worlds,
Monstrous and green like the kingdoms of the sea.

EDWIN BROCK

Sanctuary!

When at midnight the Passer asks
What do you think. Red trees in the wind
Sway and the river runs down to a dusty sea
With scraps of last year's prayers and the broken
Bottles of a long forgotten banquet.

Who eats
In the same halls now covered with the grime
Of daytime's thought; who walks among the swollen
Leaves and hears the long dead bird give song;
O country where will I find you in these hours
Of walking?

The waking and the sleeping child
Knows all I have to learn. Yet in an unattended garden
Some small god smiles and I with the olive branch spear
Sharpened in my hand call out for peace.

II

Beyond the tower that holds a tolling bell I meet
 The faithful, hear their songs and see the young girl's hair
 Blown in the wind; their voices cross across the rocks
 That bind us: Holy, holy, holy.

My songs sing only with the sound
 Of blood, and spears have fallen and lie rusting where
 I lie

Warrior you kneel bent and beaten
 O green eyed girl. O voice. O faith.

III

You with the loosely swinging arms and broken feet,
 You who cry penitence and limp behind the crowd,
 You who scorn thirst and cross the river by its shortest
 route

Will you not wait for me. If I come towards you
 With my tapping stick and leprous hands, will you
 Wait? Penitence I cry to the high hills, and you
 Whisper Faith.

Quickly, their singing fades and all light
 Is lowered. Quickly, are they not your people?
 The high note of their final praise is passed
 And still you do not go.

Only the river you have crossed
 Runs more swiftly, gives no reflection
 And is thick with blood. O final saviour
 Will you too leave me waiting?

IV

If I sing aloud will scorpions scurry from my feet?
 If I stand with open arms will there come a sign?
 The bread I break shrieks in my throat
 Will my body serve for wine?

NOEL WELCH

Gilles de Rais to Joan of Arc

Do you remember how we rode side by side
So close that our armoured knees often struck
And the noise made you laugh?
Your laughter was like the scattered cries of larks.
You held the reins so lightly
That you scarcely seemed to hold them at all
But when you leaned to speak
Your breath was a small flame on my cheek
Urging another charge; although our men were so battered
That they stood together like stacks of straw.
And the more quiet times when as we rode
You talked of the Virgin's blue mantle and of fleur de lys
And my horse shook out his mane like a long fringe of
Hell?
Do you remember how the frogs croaked at night?
You liked them for their coldness and independence, for
their aplomb.
I can see you now so stiff after a day in the saddle
That you moved like a clockwork soldier;
Your tired legs divorced from your proud mare
Lying together like a pair of scythes,
The moonlight gleaming on your jointed armour.
Waking to the clamour of an army preparing for battle
You established the sounds of Spring
And made success as inevitable as the splitting of buds.
I see your compact head moving against a line of poplars;
The leaves unreal and still like the edges of my mind
But sometimes they flickered flecking you with fire
Making you ardent and unapproachable,
Until one day you were wrapped in a burning dress.
Oh its dark embroidery confused my mind,
Enmeshed my judgment and left me beggared
On the charred fields of France;
And bored if you but knew how bored.
I spent my time riding from castle to castle
Walking through room after room opening windows
That all looked on the same flat fields
The same blue senseless sky.

Till one day I heard a boy singing.
His voice was like an unsheathed sword.
You would have liked him Joan; he was green as your
 frogs
And smelt as sweet as the lilies we shattered for their scent
When we wanted to forget the stench of blood.
I had much to forget: the waste of France
The waste of my own mind vaster far than France,
So I kept him a caged bird to sing to me.
I found others but they did not sing so well
And I used them as we used the lilies
Filling with their sweetness the huge emptiness.
I, who could have wooed heaven in wondrous ways
So that even saints and martyrs would have been amazed
And envious too, dissipated my gift
On immature boys, made them small participants
In what should have been mine alone,
Been penance enough to expiate much.
I was a master in pain
Tortuous as your flame, lambent and languishing too,
 leaping and keen.

How was I lost to Good
I who rode beside you and often saw your face
Streaked with sweat smiling amid the anguish
And in the evening when the stars were low like flowers
Crying like a child? Oh ambiguous maid
You touched most poignantly my ambiguity.
The cross is covered.
I stand in darkness am darkness itself.
The last remnant of my art I turn to myself
And break my heart.

EWART MILNE

The Word

I was a word and walked
in russet mantle clad and held
the lovers' heartbeat cupped within my hand

I was a word and hurled
my bolts of thunder at the tyrants' thrones
that crumbled and were dust at my command

I was a word and I was sought
by day who loved me and by jealous night
I dwelt in green and brightness was my sword

I was a word and now I sit and beg
the mocked of passers-by the frailest of the frail
and no man heeds me in or out the city gates

And no man heeds the stranger word the youth
but I have seen him early early walking forth
whose striking hour will set my pyre alight

MAX CHAPMAN

Night Passage

Blow horn fringe night
Sound far funnel distances
Crying all roof-ridden fathoms
And the antic triton.

Drift voice the fog ways
Lift water-melon faces
Crying your most mute prow
In the white harbour.

Close creep to sleep sweet conch
Sirene-lilted sheets
Crying all sail for Cythera
And your salt-sweet yesterdays.

OSWELL BLAKESTON

The Eagle

(for M.C.)

Once more
To hurl my dying falcon at your door
So through the falling shadow
Your white tomorrow.

Points of departure, aching haunt
Of gilded eyrie above wingless hunt,
Still memory bonds me with a lease that reads
Now your compassion is my hired-bird's dreams.

Do I not owe you more than soul can choke,
Your ribbed chasms, feathered looks?
Then climb to praise the hooded air you crush
To spare the sparrow in his bare ambush.

LEONARD L. WOLF

Parable Peddlars

If then, taken as the earth moves,
I had been taken as a token,
Or, fallen on the stone-shaly earth,
The seeds of the many fallen things
Had been nurtured even in crevassed
And all hidden places,

Then parables would seem to me
As unprivate things that are twisted
Out of the mouths of those who speak
Most clear and unprivate.

But the seed is scattered triad
On a many varied earth,
And the token is a forged coin
Fooling the stamped eagle
And visage of Caesar,
And the coin is much handled.

The triple-varied earth,
The stone-shaly barren,
The shallow sub-surface,
And the ultimate much handled coin
Of unauthorized mintage
Have made me and many,
Parable peddlars
And bitter with ruth.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Age Be Your Orchard

May Springtides carry a young moon
To Summer's peach smooth climate
And bird breath speed fortune
As a disciplined and generous ship
Away from malignant whirlpool and seditious rock
Towards an unpretentious harbour.
Marvel at the old tunes turned in Winter
The smoke happy hearth and hospitable cinder
Fate's amulet and stone's traditional warning.
See the world as a tarnished bauble
Power as a dry rot in the mind's rafters
And lust as maggot triumph over flesh.

Age be your orchard after apple years
And memory a rich holding for anonymous harvest.

KATHLEEN NOTT

Home Thoughts on Going Abroad

When I leave, what will leave with me, my waving hand,
and what fall back to land?
Where shall I first feel pain, that will be
cut off by the sharp sea?

Cliffs are the countenance of a whole being
beheld by another: by the alone,
the withdrawn. And this clear twilight is like seeing
death which has long receded, as from our own.

which is still in the air that still may break in rain
from the fresh rivers or turn again
its birds to the hollow of leaves. For this belief
that we are long territorial in our grief

grows loud above the iron journey down to shore:
chasms cleft by ancient journeys into the core:
the loss of men and noise in narrowing places—
such whispers will touch fading faces.

It is likely that we
so swiftly, strongly withdrawn by the ghost sea
may hear in our minds the land go on
into the final silence, alone.

as if now already it were hapless falling-away of graves
and the moody depths of dissolute waves
could clap a hand over speech. We are likely to hear
open silence as fear

and a waste as always the echo of man,
and to think the engulfing horizon can
attain with a ripple of future silence the present heart
of those who depart.

Yet I myself do not hear
that desert silence—beneath the high wire note of fear—
thicken only with weeds, nor pity the unmanned
and powerful striding of the land.

Such compassion must be
only from those who know the gnarls and age of their tree
or watch for the bird which out of the jig-saw sky
falls to its name, and to die.

I see them blunder, the birds, against the white.
My air is wildness running against the light,
my woods a dark in the darkness. The sky has wings
I could never name. I shall remember the nameless things

but at least with the names that I know,
which were thick about us in air, although
by none of us heeded. They floated down
like parachute-bells, from storeys, or raised the town,

shouting between scaffolds. The long sigh,
the short breath, rolled the stone to the top of the sky,
and mastered the mad grass, bound
to its toneless whisper, close to the ground.

For the tongue is the flesh of grass. It rang the tower
in the bell of the womb. Walls are but intervals to its power
shortly and inwardly pulsing the city. Only the tolled
deaths, slower, sadder, fainter and colder

touch to those vanishing fields, where man and horse know
how to speak silence only, and seem to plough
the line of the sky to the woods converging, where they
grow into the night, and sleep is the shore of day.

But I shall take in my mind
a city of vowel-voices: not only their blind
echo-advance in arch and alley, with whatever they say
to the walls, but whatever the walls may

reply: the huddled window: the flat
slammed door: the cat
at a loss by the sill: the precipitate shine
of the roofs: and the snailish sign

left by the violent habitual waters of dwellings, in lieu
of silence:

 a slatternly mongrel shrew
mouthing a poisoned speech I need never understand,
was my city. And only in a pure high land

where one's voice is a stone to break
the foreign silence: the lake
a clear blue eye: the mountains handsome and blond and
 formal: longhead
the pines:—I may suddenly hear what she said.

MURIEL SPARK

No Need for Shouting

(for D.S.)

No need for shouting across the interval
Of mountain and mountain since we are
Nearer the sun and moon are far.
Here, only distance preserves an ephemeral
Idyllic metaphor.

Whatever imitation between lover and lover passes
Implicitly as bird or stream defined,
This falters about my fain, my leisureless
And word-bedevelled mind
As the wind concerns the eddying grasses.

No need, in any case, for shouting. Praise
Moves like an elegy between steeple and steeple tolling,
Stilling the natural voice.
So I am dumbfounded by our mutual days,
Amazed beneath the sun and in the night's consoling.

JOHN WALLER

Keith Douglas

1920-1944

An explorer is how I always think of you
Drawing from emotion a chart and seeking out
New ways to plant a journey; this point
Marked silence and carrion; that was cue

For gay and wasting cities; a third struck dull
Or lonely. And so you gradually withdrew
To the world behind this mirror; you knew
That the image of death was casual, beyond all

Somnolent rivers' and deserts' outcry.
If the times were hot you surely felt
Them cold, ignoring all save the lilt
Of giant horns calling the huntsmen to die.

Cast in the natural mode your answers
Seek to assuage and assure us now,
Torn from the swift eye and calm brow
So that all your dangers become dancers.

ERIC NIXON

Green is the Gallows Tree

Green is the gallows tree
the cross and the bent birch
with moss and the spring leaf,
leaning on the lonely hillside.

Outwards the fair world
under the bird's dark wings,
castle and rock and the
wandering river.

O brown heart of the village
O sheltering mill, high spire
where go the dancers in this hour
higher and higher
trampling the bracken and the flower?

O green is the gallows tree
the cross and the bent birch
but black is the grave
where the dancers rot
beneath the rock.

HOWARD GRIFFIN

Mais Comme Encore de Joye

41. *Mais comme encore de joye ils ne crioient point & s'étonnoient, il leur dit, Avez-vous quelque chose à manger?*

42. *Et ils lui prèsentèrent une pièce de poisson roti & d'un rayon de miel.*—Luc XXIV.

(To David Bridge)

What wrought the gravure of your smile
strict-held, the italic lines—
experience, the sun?—flashing this glance
that cut now to your canvas hardly dry
an abstract confluence of light and shade
filling the room with its sharp resonance
of gum? Art-toughened hands
knew they should turn to more immediate things,
the peeling of an apple, say, discarding
its crimson nail upon the floor or bath
of magic oil administered the cod.
Tanbark and kalsomine subdued the room
as if the dryrot walls, the totem pump
possessed a meaning none but you could know.
(I thought of open drawings left to dry
through light-change, rain and mist transformed
beyond themselves in curious air-blends.)

You moved
controlled by virtue making
of gestures, gods. The floor
composed of coarsely fitted wood
deceived the heel. Upon the shelves
frayed textbooks and French novels stood
with lobster buoys, denticulated shell,
skates' eggs like masks,—the hoard
a household gathers round a man.
Presence of body, rectitude and love
flourished in you consumingly and lent
perfection.—When you dried
a sunbleached sneaker over the old stove
or read a scene from Marlowe you employed
fulness of heart. The eyelight, the hair
(all that I remember) and your words

sang their bird magic, handclasp
to hand, turning as ancient gulls
impale the August with their cries.
The bread, the willow plate (a group
of artifacts) were skeletized
to your lined blance. I knew
the famishing withheld in wealth.—How odd
this simple hunger of the human being.

WILLIAM GODDEN

Thomas F. X. Murphy

I

I am thinking of a small house,
Grey, on the edge of town,
Close by the circus ground,
Where otherwise the winds brouse.

Passers think of simple folk,
A little lonely perhaps,
Judging how the bushes scratch
And the breezes whistle in the oak,

And the open winter far too cold.
There I queer Tom was born,
Lived suffered died and torn
To bits and only twelve years old.

II

Tom's Evening Song

Tickety tock goes the rickety clock
Tee hee, hee haw, ha ha, ho hum.

I have had a hard day.
I should have had. And I did.
I would rather have had a lid
Snug on my sutures along the way.

Tickety tock goes the rickety clock
Tee hee, hee haw, ha ha, ho hum.

Have an electric chair in the pit,
I'll be with you in just a minute,
He said as the years slipped by, in it.
Hello, goodbye, don't mind a bit.

Tickety tock goes the rickety clock
Tee hee, hee haw, ha ha, ho hum.

Ho hum, time to go to bedlam.
Now I lay my brains to rest
And pray the goblins leave the best
'Til I arrive ahead of them.

Tickety tock goes the rickety clock
Tee hee, hee haw, ha ha, ho hum.

III

At Night

Noisy here in the clinkered sun.
O kind wall shadow with long black hair,
Shuffling near in the hesitant air,
Not so loud, what I've done.

And you too with the pretty white hair,
This telephone is busy please.
I shall tell him you called, just to tease.
(Talk all you want, for I don't care.)

Now black is white, and white is none,
Their talk is four plus seven squared.
And the grey old head is bloody haired;
I'm at least three, and you are one.

"Now, Tom, relax, be one, beware
And listen wide-eyed to woman me.
I stoop to whisper so you can see
The devil's grin in my matted hair."

EDITH WEAVER

Old Woman of Sorrows

Shrunk to the dimension of her veins
a parched vine
clutching the sun-facing wall,
she tells, retells a tale of injury
to the rude winds.

Decay has settled on her like a velvet shawl:
moss is antimacassar
against inextinguishable laughter
shaken lightly as a flock of yellow leaves
from even the autumnal bough.

Yet the first pain of the rising sap remains
to plague senility,
and purple fruit hangs overripe in memory;
but in her eyes it is the flowers are guilty,
the flowers that are frost on everything.

In such jabberings as blackbirds use for warning
she translates her body to a book of death
to bait the young,
and snatches at bright garments
with vine-like tentacles and with
claws of the tongue.

If the old achieve compassion, it is because
they are larger than their own injury
as the sea is,
are not so parched as to deny
the weeping of the world in a child's cry.

LOUIS JOHNSON

The Garden

Oh the white mist of your flesh
indelible in my mind and that gloom
no hand could strike away but stroke
the velvet of love transfiguring the room
from something small and secret to a garden
where grew a tree where apples harden,
their meaning secret but for the serpent
tempest-twisting with wiles to tempt us.

Oh Eve; Oh Eden; like a rock to plant
my feet upon and stand to swell to song,
to praise, to pacify, to love again and slant
that bright divining-rod to the pure ore long
lightless and concealed from worth-admiring
that would fire for possession with knowledge
hereafter, dream-harboured by the aspiring
hand caressing and hot to his privilege.

Innocence lost in a mist, fogged
by the close banks of lust like memory showing
the cinema-recollection, the haunch that flogged
with white and iron heat the heart to growing
madness of falling fruit, the unusual dusk
inhibiting usual eyes and the odour of musk
in the air alive to the found and unforsaken
dream that will be dreamed again when sleepers
waken.

NORMAN LEVINE

Letter from McGill University

Flowering summer and in that Montreal
Dust and daffodils along Dominion Square
Wandered around us. We knew the cloistered climate
And the sainted streets. And by that hospital
Where tulips rose, their colours gone, we listened
And always believed that the best was yet to come.

For four nested years, there, it always was
Lying with trees, moving like a frog's tongue
Unto the tomb and the ghinko tree. Along
That sweat of green and underneath the trees
The children fat as pigeons watched through prams
Just how alike all pastured knowledge walked.

And night the lonely wind came and combed empty
That place we call as person. Then town and village
Silenced the city's chorus for us to see
The worms where roots were large near lamps, or even
The late-leave girl kissed surely in the bushes.

In Spring the wind gathered its milk.
In Autumn, we drove to the Laurentians, and watched
From father's car the blushing Maples burst
Into a red confusion. We went skiing
In Winter, uncovering colours at our throats
And scratched the swan-slope silently with feathers.
Then, tired, we went back to masonry and crowds.

And by that railway station, down that cobbled hill
With the wind blowing, turning as the street turns.
We had thick hotbread soaked in onion soup,
Spoke with laughter and careless with words
Until everyone somehow seemed beautiful.
Well-fed those days were with money enough.

Underneath the trees sitting sometimes alone,
We dreamt we were rebels. But as through leaves
And Roddick Gates and into our Montreal
We walked, that scholar-bell was often silenced
By the sweat and noise of the harbour city.

For from that walk. That daily walk.
From sweat of green to sweat of flesh.
When eyes lifted the windows of the face
And saw a beggar tapping pencils on the sidewalk,
Crooked hands and the jingle of a can.
And the organ-grinder selling his good mornings,
The words loud in the lifting of his cap,
And the red mailboxes sitting curious as birds
Watching the green and gray movement,
The shadows, and the laughter of these shadows
Now spreading. And it was getting dark.
And you could hear the whistles from the harbour
Growling across the city and into these acres.
He, talking on Longinus, and the fog-horns cooing like
doves.

So were we a year, carried for four years
As a wave starting from somewhere in the water
Pushing its way towards land. We rose
For a time, high, hanging there, alone as a racer
With shoulders forward, breaking into colours
Crashing to land. Then hushed to a white stillness.

Falling back we wait to be gathered,
In the force of the wave still to come.

PIERRE REVERDY

Secret

The vacant clock
The dead birds
In the house where all things sleep
The stroke of nine

The earth stands motionless
As if someone should sigh
The trees appear to smile
Dew trembles at the tip of every leaf
A cloud traverses the night sky

Before the door a man is singing
The window opens noiselessly.

(translated by Alec Smith)

JAMIE HOLMES

G. ACHTERBERG

Pollen

You are added again
to fluid, night and sleep.
There is still time enough.
I lie awake in the dawn
and mingle with your being
the pollen of the word.
What so arises must be alive:
light and wing, seed and child.
Death makes me poor,
but you encounter this
seeking swarm.

(translated from Dutch by Jamie Holmes)

H. MARSMAN

Paula Sleeping

This is the wife
who slept within my loins
and was a river in the shadowdale
of my subconscious life:
the red hell and the universe's soul,
who only slept before with darkness and with death.

she sleeps and in her tender body sleeps the flame
that daytimes devastates us with its glow:
her pride, her jealousy, her insolence,
her gaiety like the joy of lambs at play.

she sleeps, the roe sleeps with the snake.
how short the night,
how short is the respite
that now divorces me from passion and reproach.
for hell and heaven,
peace and venom
will when she wakens come awake again
and rage the whole day long in blind togetherness.

H. MARSMAN

(translated from Dutch by Jamie Holmes)

HENNY KLEINER

Cactus

Cactus by the roadside—
Gravel grimy,
Bristles like brushes,
Boarlike bristles.

Cactus by the roadside—
Stone scratched,
Sand sprayed,
Sun seared;
Hail hollowed;
Unheeded;
Petrol plagued.

Cactus by the roadside—
Sneers at suffering,
Vaunting vengeance
With prickly bristles.

No one comes near it.

THE POETRY OF HOWARD SERGEANT

TIME itself, the poet may argue, hangs now in the toils of death and those who would raise their voices in protest or defiant song must come to terms with a time-bomb world. There can be no counting on the future. For the first time in history every poet knows that his work and his world may well die with him. To attempt even the most modest assessment of any contemporary poet it is essential to start with this entirely new situation clearly in mind. Beyond that, one might glance briefly at the backcloth of the present stage. The war and post-war years were marked by a prolific output of competent (if minor) poetry; Auden, Spender, Day Lewis—the credulous materialists of the nineteen-thirties were hastily relegated to the dusty shelves formerly occupied by their immediate predecessors and the centre stage seized by a new Romanticism. Now the new Romanticism is itself becoming discredited in many quarters. Stability, crisis, romanticism, assimilation, classicism—the familiar cycle must inevitably be completed we are told. Whether this is so or not it is evident that no apogee has yet been reached. With Treece and the Personalists, Comfort and the Anarchists, or the prophets of Existentialism in mind one might have looked to a movement for the synthesis—but importance has shifted rather from the group to the individual and it is to such individual poets as Dylan Thomas (though probably not to Thomas himself) that we must look for our poetic crystallization of this half century.

The public tendency to think of contemporary poetry in terms of three names (as Mr. Wrey Gardiner remarked in an earlier issue of this magazine) has led to the neglect of a number of poets who may yet prove more significant than any 'likely' triumvirate. Several, at any rate, merit study and not the least interesting of them is Howard Sergeant.

Mr. Sergeant is a poet whose apprenticeship was brief. Within two or three years of his first stumbling steps towards articulation he was writing poetry as mature in its craftsmanship as it was individual in its style. To those who had followed his work in the little reviews this rapid development was apparent even in his first volume where the immaturity of the earlier poems served to emphasise the power and polished technique of those which had followed. From the beginning it was obvious that the philosophical and religious implications of his work were in no

sense narrow. His orientation to life was consistently positive. speaking of man's current historical dilemma he wrote:

*" . . . Now we have come to the summoning brink
from which there is no retreat and no horizon,
and already the waves are swirling about our ankles.
Standing at the sea's edge in a winter season,
wind buffeting our lives, how can we prove
to those who follow the infallibility of love;*

*we, who have nothing to give, bequeath to them light?
Time, it is time to liquidate death, tear loose
its tendrils from the hearts of the living and let
the leavening mountain air restore lungs' purpose
So man may learn at last an invincible story,
achieve terrible wings to weather the ocean's fury."*

And in such stanzas we find an awareness of social or spiritual despair linked with a refusal to become submerged in it. But this wider aspect is balanced by an intimate view of human frailties and an eye informed by the love of nature. Only the acute observer of its phenomena would write:

*"Wind sings its crazy swallows over lake
and shallow river, or thoughtfully carves
a symphony in stone: . . ."*

In a more personal mood he says to a child:

*"Climbing the beanstalk of your mind, I reach
a star, the private country you inhabit
where no adult proprieties encroach
upon the candleflame that is your spirit.*

*A myriad landscapes lie within your eyes.
Castles rise and crumble with miraculous ease
Here Hamelin shadows caper to piping light;
but leave no hurt perceptions in the heart."*

An interesting characteristic of Mr. Sergeant's work is its unusual variety of form and technique. One might have expected to find with the growth of an individual style, particularly of the *avant-garde* kind, that his use of more simple and traditional methods would cease. But that is not so. Concurrently with poems which the anti-modern sectarians would describe as absurdly complex and obscure he continues to write simple and direct

lyrics which they have felt bound to commend. He seems to have assimilated thoroughly the work of others (though something is owed, undoubtedly, to Spender, Thomas, Comfort and probably to several of his younger contemporaries). But the influences are little in evidence and in one poem only has he allowed them deliberately to become apparent. In this poem, which raised some comment at the time of its publication in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the mannered hand of Hopkins is undisguised:

*"Riding the soft contours of October, here
sanderlings raid the ribbed upon yellow shore,
not as the ebftime feeders, slow towards drifters,
but they, faring rod-reckless in no-fear-with-it-haste,
allhazard their quickhallowed candles, white laughter's
lilt on a welter of tide unleashed. Almost
thigh-deep there, how they highwatering wade, how goad
to a grimness, a threshing of foamflesh and fingers
the sea! Or deftly, what feather-forestalling of anger
and reaving of hope from the O-proud-scimitar god!"*

This variety in form and technique was due most probably, in the earlier phases, to experimentation in the development of a personal method, but for its continuation the same reason could hardly be adduced. It seems far more likely that his critical and editorial work over a wide field has led to a more catholic search for suitable forms.* Critical work has, too, a further effect, for where the poet may assent to an occasional weakness because he feels satisfied with the whole, the critic will look with a sterner eye. Thus a kind of censorship is applied at source, reducing output, yet at the same time justifying itself by an improved standard of quality.

He certainly possesses a lyric gift and several of his shorter love poems have those feather-like qualities of lightness which the philosophically inclined poet often fails to achieve. These lines provide an example:

*"From where I lean upon the edge of darkness
the river holds its lanterns to your face,
and where your walking breaks
the surface in a mazurka of stars
you are the syllables the wise-lipped water makes."*

* Apart from his work as a critic, Mr. Sergeant has edited *Outposts*, the quarterly of poetry, for the last seven years and has compiled several anthologies during the same period.

Although at this stage it would be premature to attempt any comprehensive interpretation of his philosophical position there are some things which he seems to be saying clearly enough, and which indicate the direction of his thought. Man, he seems to say, is a spiritual being with a spiritual goal to be attained. The individual must look into himself for the causative factors of the world's disharmony. He must penetrate beneath the deceptions projected by his inner self and, having recognized the source of his failures, emerge again in the strength of love to pursue his hazardous path towards that final good for which he was intended. This line of thought is followed in the two poem sequences which constitute his most important work to-date, and one of these, at least is worth a much closer critical examination than the circumstances of its publication have so far allowed.* In the first, comprising nine poems, the unconscious mind is represented as a sea. The sea is bounded by shores on which we find all the life and curious evocative mementos familiar to the keen eye. But these in turn represent the real, if sometimes primitive, thoughts and motives which we normally find expedient to suppress:

*"And often, peering into shallow craters
left by the tide on a sunny afternoon,
have found an apparition in the waters,
have known another image than my own
speak with my voice and travesty my features."*

These poems are rich in imagery which is always vivid and seldom less than emotively disturbing. When spoken they are heard to possess a fluency which derives from the poet's musically sensitive ear. The whole sequence provides an analysis which is much more than the analysis of a single person: it goes right to the root of so many universal problems and desires. Yet, technically, Mr. Sergeant proceeds beyond the mere use of psychology which it has become so fashionable to employ since the nineteen-twenties—for he uses it to integrate the complexities of themes which might otherwise remain obscure. This sequence will certainly repay the penetrating study which space here forbids, but unfortunately we have yet to await its appearance in book form.

The other sequence, *The Leaves of Europe*, is dedicated to the war children—those homeless orphans whose fate most of us

*It was published as a whole in *The Poetry Review* (February 1948)

have forgotten in our cynical attitudes to the post-war 'prosperity' of their broken and defeated countries. From the very first line of the first poem (and there are seven poems) we are conscious of an immense emotional force building itself up to be directed with the violence and justice of a partially self accusing finger at the responsible source of misery and terror. These poems are really moving, and the mixture of tenderness and anger reveals a poet warm to the urgency of his subject:

*"Again and again I have heard their voices
rising, like a cold and terrible wind
above the trees of Europe, whose leaves wear
the puzzled faces of children and fall
grotesquely, unbearably, as children fall,
their frail white arms flung wider than a cross.*

*This is duplicity,
fingers idle upon the pitying breast,
to whisper, a little sadly:
But these were no enemies.*

*And this is guilt—
to shout
I do not know their language!*

At a time when most of our poets are producing innumerable slight pieces and 'occasional' poems such attempts at something more sustained are a good portent for the future. But whether Howard Sergeant's poetry will play any significant part in the awaited synthesis remains to be seen.

LIONEL MONTEITH

AMERICAN COUNTRYMAN

Complete Poems of Robert Frost. (Cape, 18s.).

WHEN the late F. O. Matthiessen introduced the recently published *Oxford Book of American Verse* he referred to Robert Frost as the central figure, with Eliot, of contemporary American poetry, the one representative of the natural, the other of the urban scene. If by now we may rightly claim Eliot as English that leaves Mr. Frost in undisputed possession, unless one were to make a reservation—charges of potentiality, perhaps, rather than the actual achievement, in favour of W. H. Auden.

If I were asked to define in a phrase wherein lay Robert Frost's poetic significance, I think I should answer—in his imaginative interpretation of the earth: a farmer's interpretation; and American earth. For Mr. Frost is three things—though the three are not really separable: he is a countryman who was farming for ten years early in the century in New Hampshire; he is an American; and he is a convinced individualist.

The experience of the farming countryman gives us a poetry that is as rich in regional detail as the best of Whittier's, a poetry of meticulous observation of the little things that make up the tragedies and comedies of the countryside. This is the source of that deep-rooted optimism that does not depend on any Utopian view of human nature, but is born of a patient understanding of the organic rhythms of the natural world and of the seasons' slow, unhurried ways, and of the ultimate identification of his values with them.

Secondly, he is indisputably an American. It is not only the heightened colloquialism of his style—which is typically un-English in its speech rhythms—nor the fact that, for example,

*'The whippoorwill is coming to shout
And hush and cluck and flutter about'*

where we should look for the nightingale; but that in his verse there is a conception of vast territories, wide spaces and a land that is but lately tamed. There is about his landscapes none of the intimacy and security of a country that has been cultivated through the centuries. Just beyond the boundary of 'The Pasture', for example, is the wild and still unknown; and the power of its

'I sh'n't be gone long—You come too,'

lies in the fact that when he goes out to the boundaries he never knows *how* long he will be. There is more than a hint that he may not be back at all—and we shall never be sure whether some sudden peril has overtaken him or whether it is just the irresistible lure of the wild as in 'The Hill Wife', a poem that recalls 'The Farmer's Bride' of Charlotte Mew but which has in its ending a more inexorable finality. There is another sense, too, in which Mr. Frost's poetry is American: in its sense of having no long-standing tradition: of being in its origins and until recently, a non-indigenous poetry, with its roots overseas. This is implicit in a number of places; it becomes overt in that important poem, 'The Gift Outright':

'The land was ours before we were the land's.

She was ours . . .

But we were England's, still colonials,

Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,'

until such time—and it was, comparatively speaking, only recently, that

. . . we gave ourselves outright. .

To the land vaguely realising westward,

But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced.

Frost's is probably the last generation—he is seventy-six—to feel that lack of traditional background in quite that way. To say that contemporary American verse is rootless is meant as no disparagement; it is only now putting down its roots. That does not mean that it is free from trans-Atlantic influences; it only means it is using the European well-spring to water its own native plants, much as England did from Chaucer till at least the end of the Elizabethan period. But being an American poet can mean many things. Too often Walt Whitman is thought of as being the fountain-head of specifically American poetry—and, with all their differences, his is a stream that finds its acknowledged place in Ezra Pound's work, and gives impetus to the urban rhythms of the earlier Eliot. But it is a poetry diametrically opposed to Robert Frost's. For his fourth great quality is his individualism.

Mr. Frost is no democrat—though he is no authoritarian either. To apply Browning's words in a totally different context, Frost feels that, in contemporary American democracy, 'a common greyness silvers everything': the grey of mechanical and urban

uniformity, of mass-production, mass thinking, mass living. individuation has been lost; and one of the greatest merits of his verse lies in its insistence on distinguishing the individual from the group and, within appearances, the essence. The political implications of that are manifold and implicit in much of his verse; they are debated, a little baldly perhaps, in another important poem, 'Build Soil—A Political Pastoral'. Such a poem illustrates other traits in Frost, too: a racy and widely pervasive humour very difficult to illustrate in brief quotation; and an almost aggressive avoidance of anything suggestive of sublimity. The English are congenitally apt to suspect a poet who does not at times aspire to the sublime: Ariosto has never had his due among us, and even Chaucer has been accused of lacking 'high seriousness.'

The poetry of Robert Frost has an amplitude and a narrative power that even the generous selection in the *Oxford Book* scarcely conveys—although power of sustained writing was one of Matthiessen's criteria and he has included one of the best of the longer poems, 'The Death of the Hired Man'. Sometimes it is exemplified in a quiet country story like that or the briefer 'After Apple-Picking', 'Blueberries', or 'A Servant to Servants'; at others it is the dramatic polemic of 'Building Soil' or 'The Lesson for To-day', or the not wholly successful 'dramas', which conclude the *Complete Poems*, 'A Masque of Reason' and 'A Masque of Mercy'. But whatever Frost writes, brief lyric—some of them ephemeral enough—or lengthier narrative, its key-note is integrity in both senses of the word. Such poems form, in either case, a structural organic unit, however loose the verse form or colloquial the diction; and in even the slightest of these lyrics, and often hidden beneath his highly individual humour, is an answering truthfulness to life as the author has experienced and evaluated it on his pulses.

The time is approaching when the work of the English Georgians will come up for revaluation and sifting. When that time comes the poetry of Robert Frost, even allowing for differences of environment and tradition, may well be the norm against which the authenticity of that considerable body of rural verse may be measured. Frost is probably the only nature poet of undisputed first rank writing in our time and the only one whose work could be used as such a measuring-rod. It may be that the quiet, careful and loving descriptions of Edmund Blunden will take their place beside it, though lacking Frost's

full, natural vigour and pervading humour. And certainly the bare, authentic statement of Edward Thomas, so much influenced by his friend Frost—there is a poem to Thomas in this book—will earn renewed respect and appreciation by the comparison. But for the rest, odd lyrics apart and always excepting De la Mare as a law and kingdom unto himself, one wonders how many of the group will earn a place in the realm of the genuine country poets—as distinguished from the country week-enders—which Frost rules as his demesne? Probably only W. H. Davies. Meanwhile, here is the standard volume.

HERMANN PESCHMANN

The Hardest Freedom, by SYDNEY TREMAYNE (Collins, 6s.).

IN F. L. Green's latest novel, *The Magician*, one of the principal characters is a conjuror whose life's ambition is to perform the impossible with his talent, to make his audience see what he himself can see when he stretches out his empty hand and the miraculous blossoms suddenly take shape and climb into the air, if only for a second, before his eyes. It is something more than a conjuring trick: for him it is reality and in that reality he finds his whole purpose. And some of his audience do, in fact, share his experience. Without suggesting that there is a parallel between Green's conjuror and Mr. Sydney Tremayne (though there is an adroitness in the latter's deceptive use of language), one might justifiably maintain that the essence of *The Hardest Freedom* is the poet's urge to make clear to his readers what is so vital to himself, and what is beyond the normal range of action and reaction, desire and fulfilment. What is the hardest freedom? 'Love', says his magician:

*Observe this wrinkled nut. I break the shell.
It bleeds: it is my blood. I am that husk
But not the golden light that now lies free
And grows and spreading from the ground on wings
Turns back and settles and becomes a tree,
A tree of phoenix feathers and dark fruit
Soft with the lustre of a tropic night.*

But it is neither the love which thrives on a rejection of the present and centres its hope upon some vague redress in the future:

*How futile fear, hope how inconsequent
To bear sun's fire made flesh, burning to dust. . .*

—nor is it the private property of lovers who turn their backs upon the world as we know it. It lies in a peculiar quality of acceptance which is apprehended in all its implication only at rare intervals by the poet, yet for which he is persistently groping in almost all the poems included in this book, whether he is writing of the town or country, of sophisticated literary parties or *The Birch Tree* at different seasons, of Robert Burns or a workman rushing for his train at Charing Cross. If Mr. Tremain's first volume, *Time and the Wind*, betrayed his allegiance to Eliot's lines of thought, it must be remarked that his second testifies to the emergence of a personal philosophy which, though not always explicit as one might wish, is nevertheless his own.

He is a poet of moods and draws largely on nature and climatic conditions to create authentic atmospheres, not in the orthodox manner of the 'nature poet,' but as a background to his central themes. At times, however, he exhibits a tendency to let the background dominate the picture and we are left with a description of some scene, vivid enough in his imagination, perhaps, and skilfully drawn, but which seldom rises above the level of occasional verse. *Ballachulish* might have fallen into this category had it not been for the choice phraseology.

The Hardest Freedom is distinguished for its apt and more varied selection of imagery, too; though, here again, there are occasional weaknesses. For instance, in the second stanza of *Mid-way, Mid-century*, one of the finest poems in the collection:

*Half-way and changed, even the landscape fused
In pattern of alien landscapes superimposed,
One hoards a patched world homespun in the past.
Landscape disturbs acutely. Why does place
Remain more actual than any face?
Why are the stone house and the river's mouth
At the heart of this and every moment's death?
I searched the days to find the earliest light
That laughed at the sea's edge when the turf was bright,
But a fat rook, rocked on a treetop, mocked at men.*

the picture of the fat rook in the last line has, for one reader at least, a bathetic effect which detracts from the significance and strength of the opening. Fortunately, the lapse is momentary and would hardly be worth notice were it not made more conspicuous

by the high general standard prevailing throughout these poems.

The most striking feature of Mr. Tremayne's poetry is his use of conversational rhythms and idiom, by which he is able to define the subtle relationship existing between man and his environment without falling into the diffuseness so common to this type of work. *Soliloquy, Leaning over a Gate* reminds one of Robert Frost at his best.

HOWARD SERGEANT

A POET FROM DUBLIN

Reservations by VALENTIN IREMONGER (Macmillan, 6/-).

THE war years in Ireland saw a remarkable blossoming forth of new Ulster poets, whose work has been published and commented on from time to time in this magazine; and, by way of contrast, there was a period of time-marking in the usually fertile South. It would be true to say that the only poet of consequence to emerge in Dublin during the forties was Valentin Iremonger whose long-awaited volume has now appeared. The poems of *Reservations* were, for the most part, written by the time Mr. Iremonger was awarded the AE Memorial Prize in 1945. (It is a sad commentary, incidentally, on publishing in these islands that a prize-winner—and no conventional one at that—should have had to wait all these years before seeing his work in book form, while inferior volumes have poured from the presses.)

Valentin Iremonger, now in his early thirties, is not a poet of quantity; he does not write for the sake of writing and that, to my mind, is an initial point in his favour. He aims at a concise, naturalistic expression that has its basis in a disillusioned romanticism ("we are the last romantics"). Or the *lost* romantics? Regret for youth slipping by before one has had enough of it, the toll of the years on ideals and on integrity, the autumnal flavour of decay and despair: these dominate a sensitive and fastidious mind.

*Someone should tell her how the years drip down
Like water from a leaking cistern, wearing out
The patience of the best; and how the silver
Mirror gives no occasion for regret.*

And he says in a poem written at twenty-six:

*It is early
To be regretting the things that will be gone,
The fine-drawn skin, the midday sun, the hot
Ideals that show
Indulgence, lack of integrity or false sympathy rarely.*

The honest man is honest enough to doubt his own honesty; yet one sometimes feels that Mr. Iremonger harps too much on the theme that it is later than we think—a blatantly romantic attitude which he might perhaps disapprove in theory.

He has been criticised strongly in Ireland for not being sufficiently "Irish"; apparently it is not enough to be a good poet—Irish poets have, it would appear, some natural bardic superiority to those of other countries. And he has been reprimanded for being "modernistic" and "cosmopolitan" by various Gaelic arbiters of taste. The only possible reply is that the time has come for poor old Cathleen ni Houlihan and all those Abbey Theatre gods and goddesses to be left quietly in their several graves, for they have been overworked to the point of boring all possible readers.

Instead, Mr. Iremonger attempts to write as a poet of the twentieth century, aware of its cruelty and frustration and dissonance. When he writes of Ireland at all, he sees that bit of it he really knows—dear, dirty, unpunctual, gracious, exasperating Dublin, with Dean Swift glowering ferociously in his night-shift, and Sandymount strand with its "tin-cans, gravel heaps and dead walls". The Connemara peasant can mean little more to a real Dubliner than it can to a denizen of N.W.3—less, possibly, for Dublin tends to scoff at everything outside its own boundaries.

What are his influences? Eliot appears to lurk behind his concern with time; Auden has taught him city imagery and the use of chromium, up-to-date slang; Dylan Thomas is partially responsible for the preoccupation with childhood and its bitter sweetnesses. But the influences are understood, assimilated, and he is beginning to find an idiom of his own, brittle, restrained, caustic and tender. The poem *Icarus* shows him, I think, in full control of theme and treatment; here and in a few other poems in this selection one feels that his voice is fresh, individual, not to be ignored. It is ironical that Mr. Iremonger's reputation is greater in Ireland than it is here where his work is more likely to be widely appreciated; one must hope that *Reservations* will reveal an important new talent to serious readers of contemporary poetry in this country.

ROBERT GREACEN

